

CIRCULATION ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

As required by California Government Code Section 65302(b), the Circulation Element is correlated closely with the Land Use Element. The Circulation Element provides the framework for City decisions concerning the circulation of people and goods. It addresses the City’s multi-modal transportation system, including facilities for driving, walking, biking, taking transit, and moving goods. The Circulation Element includes goals and policies under the following topics:

- Efficient Movement of People and Goods
- Safe and Healthy Mobility
- Reduced Environmental Impacts of Transportation
- Integration with Regional Networks

Today, most people in the City of Sonoma travel to work by passenger vehicle, mostly driving alone. However, people also bike, walk, and take transit to get to work, school, for shopping, and for recreation. According to the *Sonoma County Travel Behavior Study* (Sonoma County Transportation Authority, 2020), nearly half of the overall trips made in Sonoma are under two miles in length, and nearly 80 percent are under five miles, meaning that there is a strong potential to shift travel from driving to other modes. Fostering such shifts is in line with State and local goals to reduce the environmental impacts of transportation, as well as Sonoma’s desire to provide a circulation network that effectively serves all users.

Transportation safety is of paramount importance in Sonoma. Based on 2019 data from the California Office of Traffic Safety, the City ranked in the mid-range among similar-sized communities in California for overall crashes, suggesting that there is much room for improvement. The Circulation Element calls for the City to use a “Safe Systems” approach emphasizing the need to consider how the design and operation of circulation facilities influences safety for all travel modes, and for users of varying ages and abilities. The way that circulation facilities are configured and operated is also directly tied to the concept of “Complete Streets” and can help to improve public health by accommodating and promoting healthy mobility.

Sonoma’s position within the broader North Bay area means that it must contend with issues like pass-through regional traffic. To address such issues the City should take an active role in regional transportation activities ranging from safety initiatives to evacuation planning efforts, and even regional planning efforts related to facilities well beyond Sonoma’s borders such as the Highway 37 corridor and connectivity to possible future passenger rail extensions.

Background information regarding transportation and circulation is provided in Chapter 3 of the *General Plan Existing Conditions Report*.

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This element includes the following four broad goals addressing transportation, circulation, and mobility throughout the City of Sonoma.

- **Goal CIRC-1: Maintain a Circulation System that Provides for the Convenient and Efficient Movement of People and Goods to All Parts of Sonoma.** This goal emphasizes providing a well-connected circulation network throughout the City of Sonoma that provides for efficient movement of people and goods on the City's roadway network. In addition to connectivity and efficiency for autos and goods movement, roadway facilities form critical links for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users of all ages and abilities. Providing roadway facilities that serve the needs of all users in consideration of the surrounding land use context will fulfill the City's desire to provide a network of "complete streets." Off-roadway pedestrian and bicycle linkages including connections among neighborhoods are also key components of efficient mobility in Sonoma.
- **Goal CIRC-2: Maintain a circulation system that promotes safe and healthy mobility.** This goal supports a Safe Systems approach to developing complete streets in the City, emphasizing the role of circulation infrastructure design in the safety of all users. Promoting safety for all users requires special attention at intersections and in residential neighborhoods, and may require prioritizing non-motorized modes in high activity areas like near schools and the Sonoma Plaza. Importantly, maintaining a Safe Systems approach has the added benefit of incentivizing and making non-auto travel more appealing, promoting healthy mobility.
- **Goal CIRC-3: Reduce the Environmental Impacts of Transportation.** This goal recognizes the effects of transportation on the environment, including the complex relationship between land use and circulation as well as the physical design of transportation infrastructure. The goal seeks to reduce the environmental impacts of transportation, ranging from effects on air quality and climate change to pollution associated with stormwater runoff, requiring consideration of how development influences VMT and incorporation of strategies to reduce the amount of auto travel generated by Sonoma's residents, employees, and visitors. Additional environmental benefits on the City's circulation network can also be achieved through provision of green and electric charging infrastructure.
- **Goal CIRC-4: Effectively Integrate the City's Circulation System with Surrounding Regional Networks and Evacuation Routes.** This goal recognizes Sonoma's relatively small size and important position within the regional circulation network, calling for the City to work collaboratively with the County of Sonoma and Caltrans to maintain a connected and effective circulation system. The City must also proactively participate in regional transportation plans led by Sonoma County Transportation and Climate Authorities (SCTCA) and other regional partners, as well as natural disaster evacuation planning initiatives, which have become increasingly important and relevant to Sonoma.

For each goal, the policy framework includes policies and actions for implementation.

GOALS AND POLICIES

MOVING PEOPLE AND GOODS

GOAL CIRC-1

Maintain a Circulation System that Provides for the Convenient and Efficient Movement of People and Goods to All Parts of Sonoma.

Policies

CIRC 1.1: Ensure that the City's circulation network is a well-connected system of Complete Streets that effectively accommodates the mobility needs of all users regardless of mode, age or ability.

CIRC 1.2: Provide a safe, convenient, and accessible circulation network for non-auto modes, and update the vision and project recommendations contained in the Active Transportation Plan as needed.

CIRC 1.3: Improve and expand pedestrian and bicycle networks to improve north-south and east-west circulation throughout Sonoma, including connections between neighborhoods and to key destinations, prioritizing off-street pathways and greenway linkages where feasible.

CIRC 1.4: Maximize efficient use of existing circulation infrastructure, avoiding street widening to the extent possible.

CIRC 1.5: Prioritize use of transportation systems management to optimize traffic flow in lieu of expanding intersection footprints.

CIRC 1.6: Ensure that new development contributes its proportional share of the cost of improvements necessary to address cumulative transportation impacts on the multimodal circulation network.

CIRC 1.7: Maintain an automobile Level of Service (LOS) operational standard of LOS D at intersections. The following shall be taken into consideration in applying this standard:

- Efforts to meet the vehicle LOS standard shall not result in diminished safety for other modes.
- The standard shall be applied to the overall intersection operation and not that of any individual approach or movement.

Complete Streets

Complete streets are streets designed considering the full range of users including vehicles, trucks, pedestrians, bicycles, children, persons with disabilities, and seniors. There is no one single design for a complete street; complete streets are context-sensitive and respond to the land use and travel needs of users at a particular location. Complete streets make it easier and safer to use transportation modes other than a car.

- Consideration shall be given to the operation of the intersection over time, rather than relying exclusively on short-term conditions (such as school-related peaks or the busiest days of the year).
- The five intersections surrounding the historic Sonoma Plaza shall be exempt from vehicle LOS standards to maintain the historic integrity of the Plaza and prioritize non-auto modes.
- The City Council may exempt additional intersections from LOS standards if it is determined that infrastructure improvements needed to maintain LOS D operation (such as roadway or intersection widening) would adversely affect non-auto travel modes or lead to potentially adverse environmental impacts.

CIRC 1.8: Provide a roadway network that is consistent with the functional roadway classifications in the Circulation Diagram (Figure CIRC-1).

CIRC 1.9: Eliminate gaps and obstructions in the sidewalk system, especially between neighborhoods and on sidewalks and trails that access schools.

CIRC 1.10: Design bicycle facilities to accommodate users of all ages and abilities riding traditional bicycles, e-bikes, scooters, and other forms of wheeled, motorized and non-motorized, transportation.

CIRC 1.11: Promote and support active transportation as convenient alternatives to driving, especially for trips within Sonoma.

CIRC 1.12: Expand the availability of amenities supporting wheeled transportation such as bike- and scooter-share facilities, sheltered/secure bicycle parking, and bike repair stations.

CIRC 1.13: Promote transit use and support Sonoma County Transit's initiatives to improve transit service in and around Sonoma.

Actions in Support of Goal CIRC-1

CIRC-1a: *Prioritize and implement circulation improvements, including those identified in the Active Transportation Plan (ATP), through the five-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP).*

CIRC-1b: *Prepare and adopt a transportation impact fee program that establishes a mechanism for new development to pay its proportional share of circulation improvements.*

CIRC-1c: *Actively seek opportunities to fund the planning, design, and construction of transportation-related capital improvement projects, including through pursuit of grants.*

CIRC-1d: *Collaborate with Caltrans to design and implement multimodal improvements on Highway 12 within the City, including the following components:*

- *Improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities consistent with the ATP;*
- *Transit-supportive infrastructure as identified by Sonoma County Transit, as well as improved access to bus stops such as enhanced pedestrian crossings;*
- *Coordinated signal timing and/or other Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) strategies to maintain traffic flow; and*
- *Turn lanes and/or medians to enhance traffic safety and improve traffic operation on Sonoma Highway between Ramon Street and Riverside Drive; widening associated with new turn lanes must be balanced with the implications to other modes (such as lengthened crossing distances).*

CIRC-1e: *Conduct a study to establish the City's preferred vision for multimodal facilities on Broadway between MacArthur Street and the southern City limits, including consideration of the following components:*

- *Recommended bicycle and pedestrian facilities identified in the ATP;*
- *Strategies to maintain traffic flow with the fewest vehicle lanes, including consideration of whether segments with two directional through lanes can be modified to operate effectively with one through lane;*
- *Prioritization of school-age pedestrian and bicyclist safety near schools;*
- *Community vision for Broadway as a gateway corridor; and*
- *Potential need for traffic calming on parallel routes.*

CIRC-1f: *Engage the community in discussions to evaluate and select among alternatives to improve multimodal circulation and manage congestion at the intersection of Broadway (SR 12)/Napa Street in a context-sensitive manner, and work with Caltrans to fund and implement the selected improvements.*

CIRC-1g: *Adopt roadway standards addressing streetscape components including (but not limited to) the minimum widths of vehicle lanes, parking lanes, on- and off-street bike facilities, and pedestrian rights of way (including sidewalks as well as planting and furnishing zones), recognizing that Sonoma's street*

network is predominantly built out and that most circulation improvements associated with development projects will occur on existing street frontages.

CIRC-1h: *Require development projects to address adverse effects on circulation through installation of necessary associated improvements or payment of in-lieu fees, consistent with a nexus between the level of impact and required improvements and/or contributions.*

CIRC-1i: *Require development projects to provide all rights-of-way and improvements necessary to comply with the Active Transportation Plan and Development Code requirements pertaining to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and amenities and, through the discretionary review process, look for opportunities to consolidate or eliminate unneeded curb-cuts and driveways to improve pedestrian safety.*

CIRC-1j: *As part of the development review process, the Community Development, Public Works, and Fire Departments shall review development projects to ensure that developers:*

- Construct transportation improvements along property frontages;*
- Address the project's proportional share of impacts to the City's circulation network through payment of traffic mitigation and other fees;*
- Fund transportation impact studies that identify on-site and off-site project effects and necessary improvement measures;*
- Complete the necessary improvements, or pay a proportional share of the cost, for identified project-related offsite circulation improvements that are not included in an adopted impact fee program;*
- Provide onsite facilities that support active transportation and transit; and*
- Provide adequate emergency vehicle access both onsite and along public street frontages.*

CIRC-1k: *Implement the extensions and upgrades to the bicycle and pedestrian network identified in the Active Transportation Plan.*

CIRC-1l: *Collaborate with SCTCA to maintain and routinely update the City's Active Transportation Plan.*

CIRC-1m: *Proactively work with utility providers to reduce or eliminate barriers to pedestrian and bicyclist mobility created by utility infrastructure.*

CIRC-1n: *Require the preservation or replacement of cut-through paths and seek opportunities to establish new pathway connections, particularly greenways, to adjacent neighborhoods in conjunction with proposed development projects.*

CIRC 1.o: *When designing or modifying circulation facilities, incorporate best practices for accessibility and accommodation of non-auto modes, such as those outlined in the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) and*

guides published by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO).

- CIRC-1p:** *Review transportation corridors to identify barriers encountered by persons with disabilities, including locations with damaged sidewalk surfaces and non ADA-compliant curb cuts and ramps, and address such obstacles in the Capital Improvement Program as funding permits.*
- CIRC-1q:** *Work with Sonoma County Transit to improve transit coverage in Sonoma, seeking opportunities to leverage technology and new advances such as micro transit to improve the convenience of using transit for trips within Sonoma and the Springs communities, as well as more frequent headways on regional routes.*
- CIRC-1r:** *Add street and shelter lighting where needed at bus stops along transit corridors through coordination with Sonoma County Transit and require development projects to install bus shelters for sites on transit corridors.*



Figure CIRC-1 diagram

SAFE AND HEALTHY MOBILITY

GOAL CIRC-2

Maintain a circulation system that promotes safe and healthy mobility.

Policies

- CIRC 2.1:** Implement a Safe Systems approach to designing roadways for all users, prioritizing safety over automobile speed and roadway capacity.
- CIRC 2.2:** Consider all transportation improvements, including those related to maintenance, as opportunities to enhance safety, access, and mobility.
- CIRC 2.3:** Design streets and intersections to provide adequate and safe access for users of all ages and abilities, especially those who are disproportionately impacted by health, income, or access disparities.
- CIRC 2.4:** Improve city streets as necessary to preserve safety and expand opportunities for non-automobile modes of transportation.
- CIRC 2.5:** Use roundabouts and mini-roundabouts, where feasible, to improve safety, enhance pedestrian and cyclist circulation, provide traffic calming, and reduce congestion.
- CIRC 2.6:** Prioritize pedestrian circulation and safety, especially at major intersections and near the Sonoma Plaza.
- CIRC 2.7:** Prioritize bicycle and pedestrian safety for students traveling to and from school.
- CIRC 2.8:** Use traffic calming techniques to improve safety by regulating vehicle speeds and volumes on residential streets as well as on collector streets within residential areas.
- CIRC 2.9:** Enhance safety in residential areas by keeping traffic speeds low and discouraging through truck traffic.

Safe System Approach

A Safe System approach recognizes that humans make mistakes and focuses on roadway design and operational changes rather than behavioral changes to create safer streets. This is a Federal Highway Administration Safety Program that focuses on safe mobility for all users.





CIRC 2.10: Encourage walking and bicycling to promote public health and reduce the long-term transportation costs of owning and maintaining a vehicle.

CIRC 2.11: Expand the system of hiking trails through major public open space areas and along greenways and creek corridors throughout the City.

Actions in Support of Goal CIR-2

- CIRC-2a:** *Review plans for new or modified intersections to ensure that the number and widths of vehicle lanes (including turn pockets) are limited where possible to provide for moderate speeds and pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and that curb extensions and/or pedestrian refuge islands are installed where appropriate to reduce driving speeds, improve pedestrian visibility, and shorten pedestrian crossing distances.*
- CIRC-2b:** *Update the City's Local Roadway Safety Plan (LRSP) or equivalent at least every five years, monitoring circulation safety and establishing prioritized lists of improvements and actions, allowing the City to proactively respond to safety problems and changing conditions.*
- CIRC-2c:** *When preparing for roadway maintenance or construction projects, assess what additions or modifications can be made to improve safety and mobility for all users, incorporating those improvements into the project as feasible.*
- CIRC-2d:** *Develop protocols for the consideration and installation of traffic calming elements, as well as a toolbox of both permanent and "quick build" treatments, that may be used by the City and Traffic Safety Committee to identify and prioritize when and where to install traffic calming measures.*
- CIRC-2e:** *Develop and adopt a process to reduce speed limits to 25 mph or below on City streets where appropriate, such as areas around schools, parks, senior centers, senior housing, the Plaza, and other areas with high pedestrian activity.*
- CIRC-2f:** *Routinely track the City's progress in implementing local actions outlined in the Sonoma County Vision Zero Action Plan.*
- CIRC-2g:** *Coordinate with partners such as the Sonoma Valley Unified School District, SCTCA, and Sonoma County Department of Health Services to fund new Safe Routes to School plans for schools within the City of Sonoma and routinely conduct bicycle education outreach at schools.*
- CIRC-2h:** *Periodically monitor designated truck routes, ensuring that freight transport needs are being met, and that truck traffic is not adversely affecting residential areas and other sensitive land uses or relying on streets other than identified truck routes.*
- CIRC-2i:** *Work with the Visitors Bureau and tour bus providers to identify appropriate parking locations and minimize safety and parking conflicts associated with tour buses.*

REDUCED TRANSPORTATION IMPACTS

GOAL CIRC-3

Reduce the Environmental Impacts of Transportation.

Policies

- CIRC 3.1:** Encourage a mixture of land uses and higher densities where appropriate to reduce VMT, improving the viability of transit, pedestrian and bicycle travel.
- CIRC 3.2:** Consider VMT impacts when assessing the effects of development and transportation projects on the environment.
- CIRC 3.3:** Use Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies to incentivize travel by modes other than single-occupant vehicles and reduce the amount of VMT generated by Sonoma’s residents, workers, and visitors.
- CIRC 3.4:** Use parking strategies to improve efficiency and reduce VMT, such as shared and “park once” parking arrangements, and ensuring that development projects do not incentivize vehicle travel by providing excessive parking.
- CIRC 3.5:** Ensure that new development complements and extends the historic street grid pattern, where feasible, to maximize connectivity and minimize travel distances for all modes.
- CIRC 3.6:** Recognize the role of streets in providing a sustainable system of public spaces, areas to expand the urban tree canopy, and opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure.
- CIRC 3.7:** Reduce auto reliance by using “last mile” solutions such as bikeshare facilities for residents, workers, and visitors.
- CIRC 3.8:** Recognize the effects of tourism on transportation, supporting measures to reduce reliance on personal vehicles for visitor and tourism-related travel.
- CIRC 3.9:** Support the creation of electric vehicle charging stations at commercial, government, and other employment and community destinations.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)

VMT is a measure of the total distance traveled by vehicles for trips beginning or ending in the City of Sonoma on a typical day. VMT impacts are calculated and assessed using VMT per capita for residential development projects, and VMT per worker for employment-based projects. Lower per-person VMT metrics indicate more efficient travel, with less driving needed to complete a trip, lower pollutant emissions, and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Actions in Support of Goal CIRC-3

- CIRC-3a:** *Assess the VMT impacts of proposed development projects using the significance thresholds, screening parameters, and guidance contained in the City's VMT Policy.*
- CIRC-3b:** *Review and update the City's VMT Policy over time to ensure alignment with State, regional, and local climate goals, and to leverage new technologies or analysis methods as they become available.*
- CIRC-3c:** *Require development projects to incorporate TDM measures as specified in the City's VMT Policy.*
- CIRC-3d:** *Establish a task force with owners and operators of visitor-serving facilities to identify and implement strategies aimed at increasing the proportion of visitor trips made by shared rides, shuttles, and active transportation modes rather than personal vehicles.*
- CIRC-3e:** *Assess the viability of establishing (or collaborating with another agency or operator to establish) an on-demand shuttle serving the broader Sonoma Plaza area for trips by residents, workers, and visitors.*
- CIRC-3f:** *Support SCTA's efforts in developing, implementing, and maintaining VMT mitigation and/or exchange programs, and allow development projects in Sonoma to use such program(s) to address identified VMT impacts.*
- CIRC-3g:** *Prioritize and implement the strategies outlined in the Downtown Parking Management Plan, maintaining and updating the Plan over time in response to changing conditions and to ensure alignment with other initiatives being overseen by the City.*

REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

GOAL CIRC-4

Effectively Integrate the City's Circulation System with Surrounding Regional Networks and Evacuation Routes.

Policies

- CIRC 4.1:** Actively work with Sonoma County, SCTCA, and Caltrans in coordinating improvements to major roads in the unincorporated areas surrounding Sonoma.
- CIRC 4.2:** Collaborate with Caltrans and the County in exploring potential ways to accommodate regional passthrough traffic on routes other than Highway 12 through the Sonoma Plaza area.
- CIRC 4.3:** Participate in regional efforts to improve automobile and non-automobile circulation on the Sonoma Highway corridor.
- CIRC 4.4:** Participate in regional planning efforts to extend SMART passenger and freight rail service between Novato and the national rail network, advocating for support facilities (such as shuttles) that would provide access between future rail stations and the City of Sonoma.
- CIRC 4.5:** Maintain hazard and emergency responsiveness, ensuring that plans are in place to facilitate emergency evacuations cohesively with surrounding unincorporated areas.
- CIRC 4.6:** Maintain and enhance walking and biking access to a variety of evacuation pick-up points and/or evacuation locations, including temporary areas of refuge.

Actions in Support of Goal CIRC-4

- CIRC-4a:** *Work with the County of Sonoma and the Sonoma Valley Community Advisory Commission to monitor potential circulation impacts of proposed development, to identify options for regional multimodal improvements, and to implement methods of alleviating congestion such as improved signal timing along Highway 12.*
- CIRC-4b:** *Work with Caltrans, the County of Sonoma, Sonoma County Transit, and SCTCA to identify funding opportunities and coordinate bicycle improvements within Sonoma Valley, to provide connections to regional routes, and to incorporate bicycle facilities such as racks at bus stops.*
- CIRC-4c:** *Work with Caltrans and the County of Sonoma to establish a unified directional signage scheme in the Sonoma Valley that directs freight and through drivers to peripheral routes instead of through downtown Sonoma.*
- CIRC-4d:** *Support SCTCA in the preparation of routine updates to regional plans*

including the Comprehensive Transportation Plan, Vision Zero Plan, and Active Transportation Plan.

CIRC-4e: *Work collaboratively with emergency service providers to identify evacuation routes, including identification of facilities and protocols necessary to evacuate those without access to private automobiles.*

CIRC-4f: *Participate in SCTCA committees including the Technical Advisory Committee and Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee.*



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